

## ROTATOR CUFF INJURY

### What is a rotator cuff injury?

A rotator cuff injury is a strain or tear in the group of tendons and muscles that hold your shoulder joint together and help move your shoulder.

### How does it occur?

A rotator cuff injury may result from:

- using your arm to break a fall
- falling onto your arm
- lifting a heavy object
- use of your shoulder in sports with a repetitive overhead movement, such as swimming, baseball (mainly pitchers), football, and tennis, which gradually strains the tendon
- manual labor such as painting, plastering, raking leaves, or housework

### What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of a torn rotator cuff are:

- arm and shoulder pain
- shoulder weakness
- shoulder tenderness
- loss of shoulder movement, especially overhead

### How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine you and check your shoulder for pain, tenderness, and loss of motion as you move your arm in all directions. Your provider will ask if your shoulder pain began suddenly or gradually. You may have an X-ray to make sure there are not any fractures or bone spurs.

Based on these results, you may have other tests or procedures right away or later, such as:

- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which creates images of your shoulder and surrounding structures with sound waves
- an arthrogram, which is an X-ray or MRI that is taken after a special dye has been injected into your shoulder joint to outline its soft structures
- arthroscopy, a surgical procedure in which a small instrument is inserted into your shoulder joint so your provider can look directly at your rotator cuff.

### What is the treatment?

A tendon in your shoulder can be inflamed, partially torn, or completely torn. What is done about it depends on how torn it is and how much it hurts.

If your tear is a minor one, it can be left to heal by itself if it does not interfere with your everyday activities. Your treatment plan should include:

- proper sitting posture, in which your head and shoulders are balanced
- rest for your shoulder, which means avoiding strenuous activity or any overhead motion that causes pain
- ice packs at least once a day, and preferably 2 or 3 times a day
- doing the exercises your healthcare provider gives you

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